



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
June 4, 2007

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## **FORMER FIREFIGHTER SENTENCED FOR SETTING ILLEGAL WILDFIRE**

PHOENIX— Former Forest Service firefighter Van Bateman, 55, of Flagstaff, Arizona, was sentenced Monday in U.S. District Court to 24 months imprisonment followed by 3 years supervised release for setting timber afire on the Coconino National Forest. Bateman was also ordered to pay a \$5,000 fine and \$10,390 in restitution to Forest Service.

Bateman pleaded guilty last October to starting the Boondock Fire on June 23, 2004, without Forest Service authorization. After intentionally setting the fire, he then left the area of the fire knowing it would grow and continue to burn.

Recently, Mr. Bateman and others have made statements in the media indicating his actions were commonplace among forest firefighters and meant only to avoid required paperwork. The facts of the case do not support that view.

U.S. Attorney for the District of Arizona Daniel G. Knauss said, "Intentionally setting unauthorized fires in this case was reckless and dangerous. Intentionally set wildfires have had devastating consequences. To minimize the importance of laws meant to prevent unauthorized fires does not do justice to firefighters who do their job honorably within the law. We are satisfied that Mr. Bateman's admitted misbehavior is being appropriately penalized."

Southwestern Regional Forester Harv Forsgren states, "Our nation's wild land firefighters put their lives on the line to protect people, their communities and our natural resources. These actions by Mr. Bateman reflect a blatant disregard for employee and public safety. Fire management officials follow agency procedures and policies and it is an insult to their integrity to imply otherwise."

The investigation in this case was conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture Office of the Inspector General with assistance from Forest Service, Law Enforcement and Investigations. The prosecution is being handled by Kimberly M. Hare, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix.

CASE NUMBER: CR-05-1190-PCT-PGR  
RELEASE NUMBER: 2007-142(Bateman)

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